

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**THE “DIRTY DOZEN” KEYS TO STRATEGY SUCCESS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The ability to formulate and implement strategy is the most important enabler of sustained organizational success. Strategy, at a basic level, digested into formulation (visioning), planning, and execution, is a simple proposition. Strategy in the real world, however, is never straightforward and simple and it is nearly always a complex, challenging, and multifaceted journey fraught with pitfalls and opportunities for failure. The vast majority of organizations do not do strategy well. This paper provides an examination of strategy and the strategy process derived from study of organizations in both the public and private domain. The examination begins with defining strategy and why it is important, it continues with an examination of strategy failure factors, and it concludes with presentation of the "Dirty Dozen" keys to strategy success. Statistics and history tell us that most organizations fail at strategy. They also tell us that the most prevalent reasons for failure are failure of strategic leadership and failure to execute an otherwise valid strategy. You, and your organization, do not have to be part of these statistics and the history of strategy failure. Embrace the "Dirty Dozen," adapt them to your organization and environment, and get on the road to strategy success.



## THE “DIRTY DOZEN” KEYS TO STRATEGY PROCESS SUCCESS

Strategy is a simple proposition. All you have to do is master a few basics. Envision the future. Decide on the “right” thing to do to take you from where you are today to your idealized vision of the future. Then, you create a feasible, acceptable, and suitable plan. And then as we hear often in the sports and advertising world from Nike, you just “do it”...you execute or implement your plan. Given this seemingly simple proposition to get through the strategy process, why then do most nations, militaries, government agencies, and commercial organizations ultimately fail at this ultimate game of strategy? Organizations fail at the strategy game for several core reasons. Holistically, they often fail because strategy must be created and executed in consideration of their internal and external environments that can most often be characterized as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. And, this strategy process must be completed in an environment in which the enemy or competition gets a vote. Holistically, many also fail because of inept leadership. Lack of visionary, inspirational, dynamic, enlightened, and broadly experienced leadership can be traced as the causal agent in many strategy failures. Some fail because they do not formulate and plan a strategy at all. Some fail because they create a bad, unrealistic, or un-executable strategy that does not consider the reality of time, fiscal constraints, and execution capacity of the organization. Finally, many fail because they are not able to focus and synchronize the organizational instruments of power. Or, in other words, they simply fail to execute or implement what may be an otherwise quite acceptable strategy. Although most organizations ultimately fail at strategy, it is my contention that strategy is a game that you can win. You can win time after time and achieve consistently exceptional organizational performance if you follow a few relatively simple keys to success. I term these keys to success the “Dirty Dozen.” The “Dirty Dozen” keys to strategy success are culled from strategy successes and failures across a broad spectrum of organizations including nations, governments, militaries, and commercial entities. Many of these keys are derived from firsthand lessons learned and personal experiences regarding strategy success and failure from the military and business domains. Ignore these keys to success and join the statistical majority who proceed on the strategy journey at significant risk of failure. Embrace this “Dirty Dozen” to significantly enhance your odds of winning in the grand game of strategy.

### Introduction

In order to frame the presentation of the “Dirty Dozen” keys to strategy success, I will first present and analyze several fundamental concepts and elements of strategy. First, I will define

strategy. Second, I will examine why strategy is important. Third, I will present and discuss common reasons for strategy failure. And finally, I will present the “Dirty Dozen” keys to strategy success. This examination of strategy and the resultant recommendations for success are applicable for all organizations. Military leaders, government leaders, and business leaders or organizations big and small will benefit from this information. The concepts herein are presented from a variety of perspectives including military, government, and commercial sources. In some cases these concepts represent divergence from traditional military thinking on strategy. Representative examples and data are culled from military, private sector, and academic teachings and lessons learned. To a great extent, the content of this paper is derived from personal experience, observations, and lessons learned that has been acquired during more than 10 years of personal experience as a management and strategy consultant to government, military, and commercial clients. An additional source knowledge is derived from innumerable dialogues with senior government and private sector executives who are directly responsible for strategy success or failure in their organizations. Some of these same senior executives provided valuable insights, feedback, and validation of the “Dirty Dozen.” These same senior executives also greatly aided the distillation process of more than two dozen draft keys to strategy success. In addition to the above referenced consulting experience, these concepts are balanced and enhanced by more than 20 years of military planning and execution experience across a broad spectrum of missions and organizational echelons.

One thing will lead to the ultimate success or failure of any organization and that one thing is the ability to formulate and execute a valid strategy. Colin S. Gray tells us that “Poor strategy is expensive, bad strategy can be lethal...very bad strategy is almost often fatal.”<sup>1</sup> There are many theories of strategy, many methods, and many theories on strategy. Some are proven, some are not. There are a variety of strategic planning processes embraced by governments, militaries, and commercial enterprises. Most processes focus on three key phases commonly categorized as formulation, planning, and execution. Similarly, most views of strategy contain three core elements -- The Strategic Vision, The Strategic Plan, and the Means to Execute the Plan. Ultimately, however, in the game or strategy, it is not the pieces, parts, and processes, but it is the end result that matters. When referring to strategy, Clausewitz tells us that “A prince or a general can best demonstrate his genius by managing a campaign exactly to suite his objectives and his resources, doing neither too much nor too little. But the effect of genius show not so much in novel forms of action as in the ultimate success of the whole.”<sup>2</sup> The proof is in the pudding! I began by stating that strategy is a simple proposition. Really, I lied, it is never simple! It is only simple in concept. “Doing,” executing, or implementing strategy is tough

business. It is a complex blend of art and science and it is most typically formulated and executed within the construct of internal and external environments dominated by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. It is almost always done in a construct of competing interests, constrained resources, and insufficient time. Succeeding here takes experience, tenacity, and perseverance. General (Retired) Colin Powell tells us that "There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure."<sup>3</sup>

Many organizations and leaders fail to effectively engage in the strategy process, often because they view it as too complex and daunting. Ultimately, this leads them to failure. Many more, engage in, but never succeed in the process, sometimes because they get tangled in the web of process, personalities, and internal competition and they forget that the endstate is the objective and not the strategic process itself.

Effective development and execution of strategy is your surest means to lasting organizational success. Strategy is your way of shaping the future, within your sphere of influence, to achieve your idealized vision of the future. Simply put, your strategy is your way of changing the future to enable your continued existence, success, or excellence. Strategy does not come by accident, but results from focused and disciplined leadership and organizational effort. It is not easy, but may be achieved with hard work. Likelihood of success is greatly increased through the studious application and integration of lessons learned from your own and others' successes and failures. Nation-states have come and gone. Governments have come and gone. Businesses of all types and sized, from major international conglomerates, to dominant single industry giants, to literally hundreds of thousands of smaller businesses have been conceived and ultimately failed. All of these entities have one thing in common; they have failed to master strategy.

### What is Strategy

As a starting point on the journey to the "Dirty Dozen" keys to strategy success, I will begin with defining strategy. The definitions of strategy in military, government, and business are tempered by the nature of organizations within which they apply. The Department of Defense defines strategy as "the art and science of developing and using political, economic, psychological, and military forces as necessary during peace and war, to afford the maximum support to policies, in order to increase the probabilities and favorable consequences of victory and to lessen the chances of defeat."<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Webster's provides a very similar definition derived from the Greek word "strategia"..."the science and art of employing the political, economic, psychological, and military forces of a nation or group of nations to afford the

maximum support to adopted policies in peace or war.”<sup>5</sup> Although the term strategy is used outside of the military domain, uncovering a civilian governmental and/or a business centric definition of strategy is a little more challenging. Military organizations are not the only entities that embraces the concept of strategy...everyone says they do it...but the military seems to be the only one that had penned a commonly accepted definition. In the writings of various business authors, business schools, and business or “strategy” consulting firms, we find a plethora of definitions of strategy. McKinsey & Company, a top tier-strategy consulting firm, for example defines strategy as “a coherent and evolving portfolio of initiatives to drive shareholder value and long-term performance.”<sup>6</sup> Renowned business author Michael Porter describes strategy as “a broad formula for how a business is going to compete.”<sup>7</sup> In the book *Strategy* from the Harvard Business School, strategy is defined as “a plan that will differentiate the enterprise and give it a competitive advantage over rivals.”<sup>8</sup> Most commonly in the business world, we find strategy modified by some adjective such as Marketing Strategy, IT Strategy, Change Strategy, etc. Interestingly, although almost all business authors, consulting firms, and businesses themselves talk a lot about strategy, a common or even reasonable definition of strategy is difficult to find. Most definitions of strategy, regardless the source, have some common elements. First, is the element or concept of a vision or idea of where you want to be in the future. Second, there is a plan or how you are going to get from where you are today to where you want to be in the future. Although it is a core element of the strategy process, few definitions adequately address the execution or implementation phase of strategy.

I have formulated my own refined definition of strategy. I define strategy, as...the art and science of formulating a realistic vision of the future, developing a feasible, acceptable, and suitable plan integrating and synchronizing all instruments of power that translates the vision into operations and tactics (campaigns, programs, projects, initiatives), and ultimately executing or implementing the plan to achieve the vision. In short, it is having a vision, developing a plan, and implementing the plan to achieve the vision. I believe that this definition is broadly applicable to government, military, and business.

For simplicity, we will look at “strategy” as a three-phased process: Visioning, Planning, Executing. Although there are certainly many sub-components of each of these phases, these three capture the major muscle movements of the process. In many business readings, these three process steps are further condensed to just two phases...formulation and implementation/execution. Formulation in this case referees to both visioning and planning.

From the above definitions, we can derive several core elements of strategy. At its most basic level, it is comprised of a vision – where you want to go to or be at some point in the



future, a plan – what you will physically do and how you will achieve your vision using your resources, and finally an execution method – actually getting from “here” to “there”. We also derive that vision component of the strategy must be based upon something...there must be something to derive the vision from. Most commonly, in the DoD and Government, we view vision as being derived from inherent core values, beliefs, and policy. Thus, by example, when dealing with National Security, we first have a national security “policy” based upon our core values and enduring themes, from which a national security “strategy” is derived. In business, more typically, we see strategy as being derived from a variety of sources including common elements such as laws, rules, regulations, and cultural norms, as well as organizational specific elements such as core values. In the following sections, we will briefly define some key strategy and strategic planning concepts and terms.

All strategy must start with a vision. Strategic vision is the articulation and/or depiction of an idealized future for the organization. The vision is that holistic endstate that you intend to achieve via your strategy. From the vision, we derive strategic goals and from the goals, we derive metrics. Specifically, the goals are things that we want to accomplish and the metrics are a measure of our status and/or progress toward achieving the goals. The goals and associated metrics must be specific, tangible, quantifiable and/or qualifiable and they must reflect definitive measures that in aggregate will represent achievement of the vision.

The next element that we will define and explore is the strategic plan. Most simply, the strategic plan is the bridge between the vision and implementation or execution. It is the mechanism that enables the organization to translate the vision and goals into planned actions. Strategic plans take many forms and styles. Regardless the format, the plan is the umbrella framework that delineates the operational and tactical “executables” such as campaigns, initiatives, programs, and projects that are resourced from the organizational instruments of power and that are assigned to the various entities in the organization that are charged with executing elements of the plan. The strategic plan is a marriage of the “ends, ways, and means” wherein the ends are what you want to accomplish, the ways are what you will do, and the means are what resources you will utilize. Central to the strategic plan are three oft overlooked concepts...prioritization, integration, and synchronization. Prioritization is the mechanism that stratifies the executables by relative importance. Prioritization is of critical importance within resource constrained environments and for enabling organizational focus on the most critical elements of the strategy. Integration is the concept or tool to enable unity of effort through vertical and horizontal nesting. In the business world, the concept of strategy mapping has gained momentum for enabling integration. The strategy map is a tool used to

ensure that supporting executables (programs and projects) and the activities of supporting organizations are linked to the goals and metrics of the higher organization and strategy.<sup>9</sup> From a military perspective, we view a parallel process of nesting of lower missions and intent with that of the higher command. The last often overlooked concept is synchronization. Synchronization of effort and effect are critical to effective and efficient execution. I differentiate between effort and effect because, especially in the world of strategy, the desired and/or resultant effect is often separated by significant time from the effort. Thus, synchronization must consider the effort or near term action with the resultant effect which often materialized sometime in the future.

The holistic mechanism that enables organizations to get from a vision to a plan to execution is known as the strategy process. There are a wide variety of strategy processes in use today in public and private sector. All have some common elements. These common elements are listed below. The tools, tactics, techniques, procedures, and methods for addressing these elements vary widely. There is great diversity in the “how” you do strategy. But, most common processes ensure that all core elements are addressed. The core elements depicted below are derived from a strategy process model presented in the book *Strategy in the Harvard Business Essentials series*.<sup>10</sup>

1. **Vision** – Your desired future endstate
2. **Mission** – Statement of what you are going to do to achieve your vision
3. **Goals and Metrics** – Tangible (measurable) outcomes that will reflect progress towards and/or achievement of your vision. Commonly, from a military/government perspective these are known as the “ends” for the “Ways, Means, and Ends.” This is your “goal post.” It is your way of definitively communicating what success looks like and your way of knowing when you will have achieved your vision.
4. **Environmental Assessment**
  - a. Internal – Evaluation and assessment of the capabilities, limitations, resources, and other factors of the organization or entity for which the strategy is created. One key outcome of this assessment is clear knowledge of the resources such as people, equipment, knowledge, and money that will be used to plan and execute the strategy. These resources give us the “means” of the Ways, Means, and Ends.
  - b. External –
    - i. General External – the holistic environment within which the strategy will be envisioned, planned, and executed.

- ii. Threat or Competitor External – Assessment of the capabilities, limitations, likely actions, and intentions of competitors and/or adversaries who will likely take active measures to counter your strategy and/or implement a strategy of their own that will impede your strategy

- 5. **Plan or Implementation Tactics** – This is the “Ways” of the Ways, Means, and Ends. This is the translation of the Vision and Mission into tangible and ultimately executable campaigns, initiatives, programs, and projects.
- 6. **Implementation or Execution** – This is your mechanism to turn the plan in to reality.
- 7. **Performance Measures** – Simply, this is your way of defining the status and measuring progress towards achievement of the vision.

So, once again, what is strategy? In its most simple form, it is a vision, a plan, and the ability implement or execute the plan to achieve the vision. The understanding of what strategy is leads us to the discussion of why strategy is important.

#### Why is Strategy Important

The importance of strategy should by now be clear. Having and executing a viable strategy is the best and surest means of organizational success.<sup>11</sup> This basic concept is taught in Government 101 and Business 101 at nearly every educational institution for public servants, business leaders, and entrepreneurs. Still, the past filled with failed states and failed commercial enterprises. Today’s news headline news is filled with current examples of failing organizations. Tomorrow’s news will be filled with the stories of many organizations who appear to thrive today yet who will slow, stumble, and crumble in this ever more complex and globalized environment. Lack of a viable strategy...a vision, a plan, and execution, is the primary causal agent in the demise of public and private organizations around the globe.

#### Why Strategy Fails

Why is it that more than 80% of organizational strategies fail?<sup>12</sup> Why is it that the world is filled with the history of failed states? Why is the business world filled with the debris of startups that never started and once dominant companies that are now only notable book marks in history? Why do we have a never ending stream of news regarding local, state, and federal government agencies that never achieve their stated objectives and are perceived to have failed as stewards of the American people? The one thing that they all have in common is a failure of strategy.<sup>13</sup> In the following portions of this paper we will present and discuss the core reasons for strategy failure. Strategy failure is the subject of a never ending stream of academic and

journalistic writing. In many cases, strategy failure is attributed primarily to the complex world in which we exist. I think however that it is far simpler than that. If all you have to do in “strategy” is get three things right (a vision, a plan, and execution), then it simply makes sense that failure in one or more of these core elements leads to failure of strategy. From research of various military, historical, and journalistic sources, and from dialogue with a variety of governmental and business leaders, I have categorized strategy failures as outlined below. This outline presents some holistic reasons for failure and then additional reasons grouped by the phase of the strategy process. Following the general outline, we will examine in detail several core reasons for strategy failure.

1. Holistic or overarching reasons for strategy failure
  - a. Failure of leadership – Leaders who do not lead, but only manage or supervise at best
  - b. Lack of a systematic strategy process
  - c. Organizational Gridlock/Dysfunctional Organization
2. Phase 1 – Visioning
  - a. No vision at all
  - b. Vision that is not linked to core policies, values, etc., (Grand Strategy) and/or Vision that is not “nested” with higher vision/strategy (subordinate tier strategy)
  - c. Vision that is unrealistic
3. Phase 2 – Planning
  - a. No plan
  - b. Un-executable plan
  - c. Plan that does not lead to achieving the vision
  - d. Desynchronized plan/one that does not effectively utilize sources of power
4. Phase 3 – Execution/Implementation
  - a. Lack of organizational focus
  - b. Failure to adjust to changing threat/competitor/environmental conditions

This outline presented above provides the framework for our continued exploration of strategy failure and will ultimately lead to the positive side of things or the “Dirty Dozen” keys to strategy success. Lest you think that success in strategy is a simplistic matter of mechanically following an outline, we are reminded of a core element of the definitions of strategy...that it is a balance of art and science.

There are three holistic reasons for strategy failure. These reasons cross all phases of the strategy – Visioning, Planning, and Executing. The greatest of these failures is leadership.

Without leadership, it is virtually impossible for any of the rest of the process to work. Good or even great leadership does not guarantee success, but without it, there is almost no chance of success.

Failure of leadership is the factor most commonly attributed to strategy and/or organizational failure. Change of leadership is thus naturally the most common reaction to strategy and/or organizational failure. The U.S. military, government, and industry invest tremendous resources in identifying, selecting, training, developing, and empowering leaders. The study of leadership has fascinated generations and there is a tremendous wealth of literature published on the subject. Sydney Finkelstein, in his book *Why Smart Executive Fail*, lists seven core reasons for organizational failure, four of which are directly attributed to failure of executive leadership.<sup>14</sup>

As a starting point in the examination of strategic leadership failure, we will examine what leadership really is. The U.S. Army defines leadership as “influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation while operating to accomplish the mission and improving the organization.”<sup>15</sup> Interestingly Webster’s definition for leadership is not all that helpful – “the office or position of a leader; capacity to lead; the act or an instance of leading.”<sup>16</sup> In fact, a good and relevant definition of leadership from other than military source is just plain hard to come by. James MacGregor Burns, in his best selling book *Leadership*, defines it in two ways “leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers”<sup>17</sup> He continues to define it as “Leadership is the reciprocal process of mobilizing, by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers.”<sup>18</sup> I define leadership as the art and science of providing vision, structure, motivation, focus, and inspiration to enable the organization to achieve defined objectives. Leadership deals with mechanical, process, and systems based issues, as well as more human behavioral issues. The bottom line however is that in leadership and in the characteristics of leaders, we find the need for all three key elements of strategy...a vision to provide purpose, a plan to provide direction, and organization, focus, motivation, and inspiration to drive execution or implementation. A failure of leadership can come from any or all of the above. Most often, leadership failures in the realm of strategy reflect numerous individual points of failure, but most commonly it revolves around three key elements. First, there is failure to understand his or her organization and the capabilities and limitations thereof. Second, there is failure to understand

the strategic environment within which the organization operates to include the enemy or competition. Third, there is failure to achieve a sense of common purpose and/or goals and therefore failure to achieve organizational focus, common direction, and collective action.

Lack of a fundamental organizational strategy process is another core reason for strategy failure. Strategy must be viewed and executed as a systematic process.<sup>19</sup> Further, it must be viewed as cyclical and/or iterative and not single-pass linear. The process must start with the vision and must remain focused on achieving that vision which is based upon core policies, principals, and values. From the vision the organization must derive a plan that spawns a variety of programs, projects, and initiatives. Anchored on the plan, the organization must then focus on execution or implementation. This strategy process is challenging and simply will not happen without leadership. The U.S. military has arguably the best documented and validated doctrine for this planning and execution process. Yet, even in the military, without effective leadership, it simply will not happen. Failure of leadership to specify and focus on a strategic process will result in at best a fractured and unfocused organizational effort. More likely, it will result in a complete neglect of strategy and a continuation of the status quo. Although the strategic leader often delegates the task of the strategy process to a subordinate strategic planning or operations group, he or she is ultimately responsible.

Organizational “gridlock” or the inability to proceed on the strategy process is another fundamental reason for strategy failure. This gridlock often occurs in inherently dysfunctional organizations that lack effective communications and decisionmaking processes. It may occur in otherwise functional organizations due to the complex nature of strategy and due to the fact that strategy often involves or is associated with departures from the status quo that leads to changes in organization dynamics and norms. People and organizations simply do not like change. Many organizations are reasonably good at the day-to-day execution of their core operational activities. Most, however, are not good at doing things that are new and different and that take them out of their comfort zone and challenge traditional practices, norms, and balances of power. A common sentiment is that change is fine as long as you don’t change “me” and “my organization.” Probably the greatest issue leading to gridlock in the organization is the presence of multiple dominant personalities. When these dominant personalities have both relative peer powers in the organization and also have key roles in the strategy process, you have opportunity for strongly defended personal or constituent interests to lead to gridlock.

One common element leading to gridlock is lack of a strategy process. What the process looks like is not as important as just having a process. One of the reasons that organizations, public and private...big and small, fail at the strategy process is that they over complicate the

process. This statement is not intended to imply that the strategy process is simple...it is far from it even in the smallest venture. However, when you break it down, there are only three things that you have to do: visualize the future and decide what you are going to do, decide how you are going to do it in consideration of your means (instruments of power), and finally do it.

Phase One or "Visioning" failures -- Failure in the "Visioning" phase of the strategy process will ensure that the strategy process will be long and painful at best and that most realistically, it will never happen at all. Probably the most common failure of "visioning" is failure to establish a vision at all. The "visioning" step is a senior leader or executive responsibility. Well defined and used properly, the vision is the anchor point around which the organization will rally. Another common reason for failure in phase one is failure to communicate the vision to the organization. Clearly communicating and ensuring understanding of the vision by the organization at large will enable all elements and members of the organization to "see the future" through the eyes of the senior leader. Although this vision must later be translated into tangible outcomes/goals and broken into executable activities, simply having the vision provides holistic direction. Without a vision and without broad understanding and endorsement of the vision, the strategy has little chance of success. If you do not know where you want to end up in the future, it is virtually impossible to create a plan to get there.

The final reason for failure in the "visioning" phase is establishment of a "bad" or unrealistic vision. The vision for the organization must be linked to core values and policies of the organization. Further, the vision must be realistic given the internal and external environments and the constraints of time and resources.

Phase two or "Planning" failures -- Failure in the planning phase can be attributed to many factors. Before looking at the causes of failure, we will take a further look at the core aspects of the plan as a backdrop. As previously defined, the strategic plan is the tool that translates the vision and strategic goals into something that the organization can actually do. The plan is the convergence of the three elements of the strategy stool (Ends, Ways, and Means)<sup>20</sup> wherein the ways (what you will do) are combined with the means (your resources and sources of power) to achieve the ends (what you want to accomplish). Using the strategy stool construct, the strategic goals are the "ends." These "ends" must be translated into the execution elements such as campaigns, initiatives, programs, and projects. This is "what" you are going to do...or, the "ways" from the strategy stool. These execution elements, or ways, are resourced with instruments of power and tasked to operational elements for execution or implementation. Resources are the "means" of the strategy stool. Finally, all elements of the plan must be

evaluated, assessed, and modified based upon risk presented by current and anticipated future conditions along with both internal and external environments.

The “warfighting” elements of the U.S. military are arguably the world’s best at planning at all echelons of activity...strategic, operational, and tactical. The planning done by the U.S. military is based upon well documented, practiced, and proven tools, methods, and procedures. Planning for these “warfighters” is necessarily and obviously based around the fundamental principals of military combat operations. Although not identical, all of the U.S. uniformed services follow similar methods capstoned by our still emerging joint planning doctrine. The “business” or non-warfighting elements of our military services, government agencies and organizations, and commercial organizations follow a much less documented set of planning principals and employ a broad variety of planning tools and methods. There are some common threads to plans and planning for all of these entities. First, the fidelity, accuracy, and realism of the plan are definitively tied to two central factors. The first factor is the echelon of the organization. In the lower echelons of organizations, we typically find greater fidelity, accuracy, and realism of the plans. The closer you are to the “doers” the more detailed the plan. By way of example, plans for Army Battalions, Brigade Combat Teams, and Divisions are created in greater detail than those of Corps or Armies. Similarly, plans for manufacturing plants are typically of greater detail than of the parent corporate entity. The second factor is definitive control of executing resources or instruments of power. Typically, we find that the greater the control of instruments of power or the “doers,” the greater the fidelity of planning. Conversely, instruments of power not definitively controlled by the planning entity are typically addressed with lesser accuracy and detail. By way of example, activities to be executed by the Department of State within a military theater of operation are generally planned to a lesser level of detail than those of the organic warfighters. Given the availability of broadly accepted planning doctrine, tools, techniques, and procedures, it would seem simple to apply these elements to strategic planning.

Organizations of all shapes and sizes however fail in the planning phase of strategy. They fail at planning for three main reasons. First, they fail to actually create a plan. Second, they create a plan that is not executable. Third, they create a plan that is not tied to the strategic goals and therefore will not result in achieving the strategic vision. Finally, they fail because the planning does not synchronize the activities of campaigns, initiatives, programs, and projects, and because the plan does adequately consider and/or integrate all possible instruments of power. We will look at each of these failures in turn.



Failure to create a plan at all is a seemingly inexcusable failure. However, from personal experience, I have seen many corporate executives' office shelves stocked with volumes of strategy statements, strategic goals, and visions, but far fewer that are stocked with executed or executable strategic plans. The reasons that the plan is never created are many and varied. Probably the most common is directly attributable to failure of leadership to focus and drive the organization. A second, nearly as common, and related to the lack of focus is that the organization is consumed by the day to day activities, maintenance of status quo, and execution of underlying support functions. This sacrifice of the future by focusing on current operations is closely tied to another management discipline...change management. A great example of this type of failure occurs time and again in the corporate world, especially in publicly traded companies. Companies are often pressured to enhance quarterly earning performance, to keep stock price and dividends high and stockholders and the market. In doing so, they sustain focus on the present and never get to the point of detailed planning for the future.

Failure to create an executable plan is also common. This failure is typically attributed to two assumption errors factors and one structural error factor. The first assumption error involves creating a plan that calls for a greater level of resources than are currently available or can be made available within an organization. Within the Department of Defense weapon acquisition domain, a common example is planning based upon overestimation of the Future Year Defense Program (FYDP) funding level that will be achieved via the Program Objective Memorandum (POM) within the holistic Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution System (PPBES). In the corporate world, a common example for entrepreneurial or startup businesses is planning based upon an invalid assumption for acquisition of venture funding. The second common assumption error leading to un-executable plans deals with inaccurate assessment of the external environment. This assessment error may relate to general changes in the strategic or business environment such as overall consumer spending or stock market trends. It also commonly relates to the fact that the enemy or the competition has a vote in shaping the future.

The structural error that leads to un-executable plans is failure to digest the vision and goals into "executable" elements. Here, the analogy of eating an elephant comes to mind. We postulate that the only way to eat an elephant is one bite at time. Analogously, the only way to achieve a strategic vision is one piece or element or "executable" at a time. A strategic vision is often a very large and complex proposition. Many organizations have failed to achieve their vision because they were stymied by the magnitude of the proposition and could never get started or they simply worked on the clear and simple elements...the low hanging fruit of the

strategy. The vision must be digested into manageable element...executables...or “what” you will do to achieve the vision. Common executables are campaigns, initiatives, programs, and projects. Ideally, these executables are created such that each can be organically assigned to a single operating element. Ideally, they are also created so that they have manageable durations, tactical/technical complexity, and cost. A common example from both government and business can be found in software development. On successful large system development projects, the design, development, and implementation are digested into modules. These modules are ideally assigned to a single team. The development of multiple modules is holistically planned and managed, but each individual module is worked as a discrete entity...manageable by a team. A common military warfighting parallel is the digestion of a strategy into campaigns, the campaign into battles, and the battles into lines of operation and phases and the phases into intermediate and final objectives. In this way, the work to be done (or the combat to be prosecuted) is broken into manageable elements commensurate with the capability and capacity of the executing unit. Again to tap the football analogy, it is possible to score a touchdown with a single long pass or run, but it is much more consistently probable and much less risky to score by focusing on shorter more manageable plays leading to successive first downs and ultimately a score.

The next category of planning failure is the development and execution of a plan that fails to achieve the vision. As previously mentioned, the vision or desired future endstate must be translated into tangible goals. These tangible goals are then translated into executable elements such as campaigns and programs. Again, there are two common factors that lead to this type of planning failure. The first factor is failure to translate the vision to goals and the goals to quantifiable metrics. To use a sports analogy, if you don't know where the end zone is on the football field and you also don't know how many points you need or what a field goal or touchdown is worth (your metrics), it is very unlikely that you will be able to win the game. This type of failure leads to outright failure of the plan and strategy because the organization simply does not know what success looks like. Related to this factor is the even more problematic issue of re-defining success during the course of execution or after execution is complete. Continuing the football analogy, it is really easy to score a touchdown if you can simply move the goal line to wherever you are on the field. This problem often gives the perception of success with regard to metrics and goals, but this success is rarely linked to achievement of the vision...unless of course, you change the vision as well. I have experienced this type of failure in both corporate and defense Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems development and implementation programs. It is all too common in major ERP initiatives to have schedule delays

and cost overruns. A frequent solution to poor schedule and cost performance is to re-baseline the project. In doing so, you create the perception of success by changing the goal and/or metric to what you have achieved...not what you were supposed to achieve. The reason that this situation remains a failure is that there are always second and third order effects related to you changing your goal and metrics. Often, the re-baselining of one program leads to challenges or failures in other programs due to time delays and/or reallocation of fiscal, physical, and labor resources. Ultimately, this type of failure results in problematic delays and often in failure to achieve the strategic vision.

The second factor related to plans that fail to achieve the vision is the designation of invalid goals and or metrics. There is a common business adage that what gets measured gets done. If your identified goal and designated metrics are not definitively linked to the vision, you will ultimately have failure. A common business example is found in production lines around the world. For example, the corporate vision may be market dominance and the derivative goal may be some high-level and sustained consumer purchase of your product. The resultant metric for the production facility may be quantity of product produced over time and cost per unit of product. Thus the production facility will focus on low cost production and not, for example, high quality of the product. If, however, the primary differentiating factor in customer demand and satisfaction is product quality not product price you will likely end up marketing a cheap product that does not meet the consumer quality standard. In this example, you focused your execution on an invalid metric which will most likely result in failure to achieve the goal and vision.

The final type of failure of planning concerns de-synchronized plans and lack of utilization of appropriate or required sources of power. A good plan is one within which all of the executables (campaigns, initiatives, etc.) are properly sequenced and synchronized to efficiently and effectively achieve the goals and ultimately the vision. A good plan also utilizes all possible elements of power. In the domain of National strategy we know these elements of power by the DIME (Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic) or MIDLIFE (Military, Information, Diplomatic, Law Enforcement, Intelligence, Finance, and Economic). In the corporate world, all of these apply with the exception of military, but they are often categorized differently and also include additional elements such as Intellectual Capital, Marketing, and Advertising.

Failure to properly sequence and synchronize plan executables can be tied closely to the magnitude or complexity of the overall plan. Not surprisingly, simple plans with only a few simple executables require little effort for synchronization. Conversely, larger more complex plans require much more focus and effort. Very rarely, in complex plans, are the executables

implemented purely sequentially. More commonly, multiple executables are worked in parallel with overlap and lead/lag relationships. Much of the traditional practice of program/project management is concerned with this complex relationship executable tasks and projects. From the project management world, we have two common sequencing, synchronizing, and scheduling tools known as PERT and GANTT charts. Often, these tasks and projects are planned, tracked, and managed utilizing robust project management scheduling software such as MS Project and Primavera. A common military tool to achieve the same purpose is the synchronization matrix. Regardless the tool, the purpose is to ensure that the right thing is done at the right time to achieve the desired individual effect and to compliment or enable the effect(s) of other activities. Failure to do so will certainly introduce inefficiency into the executables, and more likely will lead to plan and strategy failure.

Failure to utilize enough of the right resources at the right time to enable and/or support the executables is another common cause of strategy failure. There are multitude reasons why the right resources are not used at the right time. First and foremost is failure to plan to have the resources in the right place at the right time. Planners of all types tend to use and depend upon what resources they know best. Military planners tend to default to the application of military resources. Army planners tend to default to use of Army capabilities and resources. Corporate marketing experienced executives tend to use marketing and advertising as a predominant resource. Lawyers default to legal and regulatory action. This aspect of human nature is common and inevitable...we do and use what we know best. The ability to avoid failure of this type in planning is tied to two main factors. First, it is tied to the breadth of experience of the organizational leaders and lead planner. From the Army War College, we profess the concept of the strategic leader (and/or planner) as a triathlete...experienced and competent in multiple disciplines such as warfighting, diplomacy, and politics. Similarly, in the business world, most corporations focus on developing broad experience bases for their executives. Diverse experience in finance, marketing, production, human resources, and information technology is of great value to business leaders and planners. In addition to broadening the knowledge and experience of the leaders and lead planners, there are two additional failure avoidance means.

To better plan for and ultimately utilize the right resources or instruments of power, planning teams should be diverse and should represent experience from all of the potential domains or instruments of power. For military strategy or campaign planners, you not only need those experienced with all facets of the big "M" or military, you also need planners experienced in or representatives of the rest of the DIME or MIDLIFE.

The final aspect that leads to failure to apply the right resources at the right time, both in planning and implementation related to a fundamental human flaw wherein knowledge, is power and that individuals and organizations tends to protect their own self-interest. This human flaw relates back to one of the holistic causes of strategy failure...organizational gridlock. It also applies directly to potential failures in planning. If knowledge is power and a planner defaults to the vested interest in the wellbeing of his or her organization, the planner will be selective in relinquishing that power and in applying his resources...even to the detriment of the team as a whole. If this sentiment is permitted to prevail in the planning process and organization, the process will be long and tedious and the outcome will be sub-optimized. We see one typical example of this syndrome in the strategic planning process within elected bodies such as state and federal legislatures. Each elected official maintains a very strong interest in enhancing or at least sustaining constituent benefits. Keeping the constituent happy translates to votes and votes translate to continued presence in elected office. If left unchecked, predominant "self-interest" results in skewed or withheld resources at a minimum but more often leads to gridlock in the planning and decisionmaking process.

The final phase of the strategy process is execution or implementation...engaging in those physical and material activities that will ultimately achieve your vision. The greatest vision with the best goals, the highest quality and fidelity metrics and the best synchronized, integrated, and resourced plan mean nothing without the ability to execute. Therein, the proof is in the pudding...now that you planned and resourced it, can you "Do It." Unfortunately, the answer, all too commonly, is NO. Robert Kaplan and David Norton, in their book *The Strategy Focused Organization*, provide some interesting data regarding strategy implementation.

A study of 275 portfolio managers reported that the ability to execute strategy was more important than the quality of the strategy itself...a survey of management consultants reported that fewer than 10 percent of effectively formulated strategies were successfully implemented...in the majority of cases, we estimate 70 percent, the real problem isn't bad strategy, but bad execution...with failure rates reported in the 70 to 90 percent range, we can appreciate why sophisticated investors have come to realize that execution is more important than good vision.

There are three predominant factors leading to execution failure. First is failure to focus the organization on the strategy. Second is failure to "stay the course" or sustain the effort. Third is failure to adjust and adapt to changes in the threat, competition, and environment. The greatest of these is failure to focus.

Creating and sustaining organizational focus is paramount for strategy success. Creating and sustaining this focus is predominantly a senior leader/executive responsibility. Focusing on

the strategy is difficult for two central reasons. Ongoing operations of the organization, those things that allow the organization to function today, are often in direct competition for time, financial, and human resources. Second, implementing a strategy most often means change. Change from what we have done in the past, change from what we are doing today, change in the traditional balances of power and organizational dynamics, and change from our comfort zone into the unknown.

The planning and implementation time horizon for strategy is typically long. Often the goals that you plan to achieve are significantly separated in time from the activities that you take towards those goals. In short, it often takes a long time to see the fruits of your labor. When this time gap between action and results becomes too great, both the organization and stakeholders tend to become impatient. This lack of patience and/or inability to grasp the strategic timeline may lead to abandoning the strategy.

Failure to adjust, or to adapt quickly enough, to changes in the external environment often leads to overall strategy failure. Remembering that the competition and/or the enemy have a vote, organizations must adopt methods of “environmental scanning” to sense these changes and they must ensure that their plan and strategy execution methods are flexible and scaleable to preempt and/or react to these changes.

#### Keys to Strategy Success – the “Dirty Dozen”

We have defined strategy, reviewed some core aspects of strategy and the strategy process, and examined many reasons that strategic leaders and strategy fail. Despite the fact that most organizations fail in the strategy process and ultimately fail to achieve their vision, I contend that you and your organization do not have to be among the strategy failure statistics. Culled from the preceding information, dialogue with dozens of senior military and corporate executives, and years of developing and implementing strategy in the U.S. Army and in commercial industry, I have derived the “Dirty Dozen” keys to strategy success. This “Dirty Dozen” keys to success is certainly not an all inclusive list of the things that you must consider and do with regard to the strategy process. However, if you embrace these elements, you will significantly enhance your chances for successfully navigating the complex game of strategy.

The “dirty dozen” is organized and presented around the three major phases of the strategy process listed below. It is also presented from a strategic leader perspective anchored by the “Visualize, Describe, Direct” construct. As a review, first, we have Strategy Formulation (Visualize) wherein you create the realistic vision, establish goals, and provide strategic planning guidance. Second, we have Strategic Planning (Describe) wherein you translate the

vision into “executables” or things that you and your organization will do. Finally, we have Strategy Implementation (Direct) where in you “do it” or implement the “executables” of your strategy to enable you to achieve your vision.

In contrast to the previous section wherein we looked at the negative side, within the “Dirty Dozen” we will look to the positive side. These keys to success are presented in the general construct of “do this” and you will enable this positive aspect or element in the strategy process. Not included in the keys to success is what hopefully is obvious by now...you must to have a strategy. Again, as we know from Colin Gray, poor strategy is expensive, bad strategy can be lethal but having no strategy dooms an organization to failure.<sup>21</sup> The dozen keys to success are first presented in list format below for ease of consolidated viewing. Following the list, they are presented with short explanation and example where applicable. The list is not in any specific order with the exception of the first key....visionary, strong, dynamic, and experienced leadership. Without this leadership component, all other elements are irrelevant.

1. Leadership - Visionary, strong, dynamic, and experienced leadership is paramount
2. Strategy Team - Select your best, brightest, and most broadly experienced personnel for the strategy team and ensure that all major elements of your organization and all of your potential instruments of power are represented on your strategy team
3. Realistic Vision - It all starts with the vision...realistic and anchored by your core values, principals, and underlying beliefs
4. Change Leadership - Plan for resistance to the change that your vision and strategy will bring.
5. Strategy Process - You must have a strategy process....select it, document it, communicate it, and abide by it. And, remember that it must be cyclical not linear
6. Break the old mold - Ask “Why” a hundred times a day – break the “we have always done it this way” paradigm
7. Know the competition [enemy] - Study and know your external environment and remember that the competition [enemy] has a vote
8. Quantify and qualify your goals – you must know what success looks like and you must be able to measure your progress
9. Live within your means and capabilities - Understand, acknowledge, and abide by your internal strengths, weaknesses, capabilities, and resources
10. Communicate, Communicate, Communicate - Communicate as much as you can as often as you can

11. Use all applicable instruments of power - Consider and utilize all of the instruments of power that you have at your disposal and remember to synchronize both the effort and effect
12. You do not have to achieve the vision all at once...digest it into manageable elements and establish and maintain balance between strategic campaigns, initiatives, programs and projects, and your ongoing core operations
13. When all else fails...get external help!

Leadership – You must have visionary, strong, dynamic, and experienced leadership to enable your organization success in the strategy process. Leaders establish the vision, enable and empower the strategy team, make tough decisions about limited resources, and ensure organizational focus. Leadership at all levels is important, but the senior leader is the absolute key. Strong leadership within the strategic planning team is important not only for completion of the plan, but for resolving the inevitable conflict and competition that will occur on the team. Leadership within the elements of the organization that will execute or implement the various elements of the strategic plan is also important because if in the end you cannot “get it done” everything else in the strategy process is irrelevant.

Strategy Team – You must select your best, brightest, and most broadly experienced personnel for the strategy team. You must also ensure that all major elements of your organization and all of your potential instruments of power are represented on your strategy team. By ensuring diversity on the team you build in healthy competition, you enable representation of minority perspectives, and you engage in the planning process representatives of the organizations that will ultimately be charged with implementing or executing various aspects of the strategy.

Realistic Vision – Your strategy really starts with the vision. The vision must be anchored by your organizational core values, principals, and underlying beliefs. You must take care to ensure that individual and/or personal values do not supersede or conflict with core organizational values, principals, and beliefs. You must also ensure that the vision is realistic. At the macro level, you must apply a feasibility, suitability, and acceptability test to the vision. Theoretically, you can achieve anything given enough time and resources, but we all live and work in the real world where time, money, labor, and physical assets are limited resources. Having an aggressive or challenging vision is good because it will challenge the status quo and will challenge and inspire the organization. Conversely, having or proposing an unrealistic vision will ultimately lead only to failure.



Change Leadership - Plan for resistance to the change that your vision and strategy will bring. People and organizations are inherently resistant to change, but there can be no traction for change without at least some friction. Many people and organizations choose to refer to this requirement as change management. I believe that John Kotter gets it right in his book *Leading Change*. Change represents a departure from the comfort zone of individuals and the organization and it must be led, not managed.<sup>22</sup>

Strategy Process – There are numerous strategy processes in use today. The U.S. military and common business strategy processes are inherently similar. All focus on three core phases...visioning, planning, and executing. The exact construct and elements of your strategy process are of secondary importance to just having a process. You must also ensure that you clearly document your process, that you clearly communicate it to your team and key stakeholders, and that you adhere to your strategy process. Finally, you absolutely must remember that strategy is not a linear “single pass” chain of action, but that it is an inherently cyclical process that requires constant assessment and adjustment based upon status, progress, and on changes in the internal and external environmental.

Break the old mold – Innovation and creativity are critical to all organizations. Your competition will always seek to achieve a competitive advantage and you need to stay one step ahead. One of the greatest impediments to success in any organization or mission is the “we have always done it this way paradigm.” Legacy systems, legacy process, legacy paperwork, legacy facilities, legacy workers...they may all no longer be necessary as you move toward your new vision. At all levels, leaders need to learn to ask “Why” a hundred times a day. If it is no longer needed or contributing to the value chain of the organization, get rid of it. The introduction to *Reinventing Government* by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler contains a revealing quote “strangely enough, in the midst of change, the present course may often be the most risky one. It may only serve to perpetuate irrelevancy.”<sup>23</sup> Hammer and Campy, in *Reengineering the Corporation*, present the concept of “discontinuous thinking” wherein the central theme is that we must identify and then eliminate or abandon the outdated assumptions, rules, and practices that underlie our current methods of operation but that are no longer relevant of our current mission and environmental conditions.<sup>24</sup>

Know the competition [enemy] – Probably the most quoted text from Sun Tzu is of great relevance here...“know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril.”<sup>25</sup> In business, government, and the military, there is always competition. You must study and understand not only the competition [enemy] but also the broader external environment. There are many external factors that you must consider such as the market and economy,

technology, religion and other societal and cultural issues, and political and legal influences. In some ways, this is a reciprocal view of our DIME or MIDLIFE sources of power as would apply as elements of power of the competition or enemy and/or points of influence in the general or physical external environment. However, regardless of the method of analysis, it is critical to know the capabilities and intentions of the competition, to understand that it may well be a thinking and adaptive competition and that you must construct your plan accordingly.

Quantify and qualify your goals – You must be able to define success and you must be able to measure your progress towards achieving success. This principal is the central concept in Norton and Kaplan's Balanced Score Card. The value of metrics and the scorecard are underscored in this quote "...what measures would prompt them to do the right thing? The answer turned out to be obvious: Measure the Strategy! Thus all of the objects and measures on a Balanced Scorecard – financial and non-financial – should be derived from the organization's vision and strategy....the scorecard soon became a tool for managing strategy—a tool for dealing with the 90 percent failure rates."<sup>26</sup> In addition to providing an organizational level ability to determine status and measure progress, having clearly established metrics allows you to do two additional important things. First, it allows you to externally communicate your progress. Second, it provides the framework for an internal incentive system whereby subordinate organizations and leaders are measured and provided incentive based upon contribution to the holistic goals. As a word of caution however, you must take great care to ensure that your metrics are truly linked to your goals and vision...because what you measure will get done. If you measure the wrong thing, you run the risk of doing a whole lot of the wrong things very well.

Live within your means and capabilities - This is the "know yourself" element of the famous Sun Tzu quote.<sup>27</sup> You must understand, acknowledge, and abide by your internal strengths, weaknesses, capabilities, and resources. These factors must underpin both your vision and your strategic plan. Every organization has inherent strengths and weaknesses as well as some amount of constraint or limitation on resources. A key element of these strength and weaknesses is your people...their mental and physical capacity, their level of motivation, their diversity of experience, and their willingness to change. In this aspect, personalities and team/group/organizational dynamics is an important factor to consider. Especially on your strategy team, personalities matter! Make sure that you consider your internal capabilities and limitations in the formulation of your vision and in the construct of your strategic plan.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate – This requirement is fairly straight forward. You can never communicate enough. You must communicate both internally and externally.

You must also carefully evaluate your various audiences and the desired effect of your communication along with both the communication method and the message. For the U.S. military, this requirement falls within the domains of both information operations (External communications) and Public Relations (Internal communications). In the business world, the organizational elements are often a bit different and may include core functions of media relations, public relations, corporate relations, human relations, marketing, and advertising. With regard to the strategy formulation phase (visioning), clear communication of that vision to the organization is arguably the single most important aspect of creating internal energy, sustaining inertia, and preparing the organization for the inherent changes to be brought by the strategy.

**Instruments of Power --** You must consider the use of all instruments of power that you have at your disposal. This requirement is tightly tied to the strategic planning process and the planning team construct. The pitfall to avoid is that of defaulting to, or over-reliance on, the traditionally dominant instrument of power. From a U.S. national security perspective, this pitfall is exemplified by a prevalent default to application of the big “M” or military power. You may find that not every source of power is applicable to the strategy or the executable elements (campaigns, programs, etc.) of the strategy. You may also however find that after considering all sources of power, you may be able to find new or unique approaches to heretofore challenging or unresolved issues. In considering the sources of power, once selected, you must take great care to ensure that you synchronize both the effort and the effect.

**One step at a time –** You do not have to achieve the vision all at once. Most strategies represent major undertakings that simply cannot be accomplished all at once or in a single effort. You must translate your vision into distinct goals and then those goals into distinct and manageable execution elements. The size and complexity of the execution elements such as campaigns, initiatives, programs, and projects must be tailored to the capability and capacity of subordinate leaders and their organizations. At the same time, you must establish and maintain a balance between the new activities that are directly supporting strategy and those ongoing support and sustainment efforts that enable the continued functioning of the organization.

**Get Help –** Ok, I know that this is number 13, so we will call it a “baker’s dozen.” Sometimes, you and your organization simply may not have the capability or capacity to tackle the strategy process along. A mark of a great leader is to understand this limitation. When faced with this limitation of internal competency, get external help! Generally speaking, there are three types of external help that you can acquire in support of the strategy process. First is functional or subject matter expertise. Get this kind of help when you and your organization do

not have sufficient grasp of various knowledge sets required to formulate and plan the strategy. A common example is a business that desires to enter a new market and/or develop a new product line. The second type of external help is added capacity. This requirement exists when you have the inherent knowledge and ability to accomplish the type of work desired, you just do not have enough capacity to do enough of the work or to accomplish the work within desired timeframes. A common example is an organization hiring planning staff and/or project managers to temporarily increase their capacity. The final category of help is process or facilitation based. With regard to strategy process, this type of external help typically comes in the form of a strategy process expert, a facilitator, and/or a mediator. In the case that an organization does not have a defined strategy process and/or is not practiced in the art and science of strategy, the 3<sup>rd</sup> party can provide both the fundamental process as well as teaching, coaching, and mentoring for the newly formed strategy team. The need for an external facilitator and/or mediator is most often found in organizations that are embarking on a strategy wherein they will significantly shift the traditional balances of power within the organization as a whole. The facilitator is a tool for the senior leaders to avoid internal “gridlock” and/or to overcome organizational dysfunction related to subordinate leaders and/or organizational elements that seek to protect and sustain their domain in contravention of the strategic direction of the organization as a whole.

### Summary

The ability to formulate, plan, and implement a valid strategy is the single most important enabler of sustained organizational success. At one level, digested into formulation (visioning), planning, and execution, strategy may seem like a simple proposition. It is, however, nearly always a complex and challenging endeavor fraught with pitfalls and opportunities for failure. It is also a process and endeavor that most organizations big and small do not do well. We have looked at strategy from several perspectives, the definition, why it is important, and why it fails. Finally, I have proposed the “Dirty Dozen” keys to strategy success. These keys to success, culled from military, government, academic, and business research and experience represent some core proven elements to success in the ultimate game of strategy. Statistics and history tell us that most organizations fail at strategy. They also tell us that the most prevalent reasons for failure are failure of strategic leadership and failure to execute an otherwise valid strategy. You, and your organization, do not have to be part of these statistics and the history of strategy failure. Embrace the “Dirty Dozen,” adapt them to your organization and environment, and get on the road to strategy success.

## Endnotes

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